

The Builder.

No. CCCLXXXIX.

SATURDAY, JULY 20, 1850.



FRIENDS and foes to the proposed International Exhibition of 1851, are alike anxiously inquiring the determination as to the intended structure in Hyde-park. The sad mistake made by the Building Committee gave a chance to the latter which they never expected, and jeopardised the scheme: it is to be hoped, however, that this may yet be overcome, and the exhibition be successfully carried out. Error has, unhappily, marked nearly every step yet taken in the endeavour to conduct the undertaking. That this has been the case, none grieve at more than we do, but while we refuse to join in vulgar and indiscriminate abuse of men who are, we believe, acting quite disinterestedly, we must not, by silence where objection is demanded, give ground of reproach to some of our correspondents, who taunt us, undeservedly, with desire to shield individuals from merited reprehension. It was sufficient for us to expose the injustice of the *continental* report of the Building Committee, without calling bad names; and when we pointed out, in a few quiet lines, the real size of the abandoned dome—inquired which of the Committee, individually, would take the responsibility of its stability—and advised the abandonment of brick walls—we sufficiently drew attention to the matter, and marked our own opinion of the erroneous design, without immediately saying, point blank, to such justly distinguished men as Messrs. Barry, Brunel, Cockerell, W. Cubitt, Donaldson, and Stephenson, you are altogether wrong, and have put forward an absurdity which will not be carried out. That they were altogether wrong we were just as fully satisfied then, as they are themselves, we suppose, now.

The only mode apparent to us of accounting for their mistake, is the belief that they did not intend the building to come down again. They were scarcely aware of the strong and proper feeling which exists against permanently covering in one foot of the Parks, and thought this a quiet way of providing the metropolis with a National Gallery of Art.

The tenders for the building, according to the published plan, were received on the 10th inst. In one shape or another about nineteen were sent in, but there were not more than eight for the complete structure, and these, we believe, ranged from the sum of 150,000*l.* down to 120,000*l.*

Among the parties who tendered, we may name Messrs. Brassey; Hennett; Jay; Fox and Henderson; Perks and Mackeen; Swaine and Bovill; and Turner, of Dublin; though the tender of the latter, it is said, was not in a sufficiently complete form to be taken into consideration.

The "specification of contract for the works" contained intimation, in three lines at the close, that "Tenders for methods of construction other than those shown upon the Drawings, and described in the Specifications, would be entertained, but on condition only of their being accompanied by working drawings and specifications, and fully-priced bills of quantities." This mixing together of a com-

petition for designs and a competition for prices seemed to us open to many objections, involving injustice to those who had submitted designs in the first competition. Obviously, any person who has seen a heap of rejected suggestions for effecting any particular object, is in a much better position to succeed than one who has not. The intention, apparently however, was, not that designers should again enter the field, but that practical men, in making their estimates, should have the opportunity of suggesting cheaper or better ways of doing the same thing,— "methods of construction other than those shown upon the drawings."

Be this as it may, an entirely fresh design by Mr. Paxton, was sent in, accompanied by a tender from contractors to execute it for about 105,000*l.* This design, with alterations, to which we shall allude, will be carried out: it appears to have been viewed as a means of escape from a difficulty, and was jumped at. A view, with description of it as at first proposed, has been so widely circulated that most of our readers have probably seen it. It follows the plan published by the committee to the extent of being a long parallelogram: the frame-work is of iron, the sides, ends, and roof are glass. It is in three stories, one behind the other, so that the ends show as a pyramid of three steps: the roofs are drawn as if flat, but according to an explanatory letter from Mr. Paxton to the *Times*, "the construction of the roof does not even approach to flatness, but is so arranged with ridges and valleys as to carry off water much quicker than roofs of the ordinary kind."

In setting forth the advantages of the plan, the designer says it gives an opportunity of introducing, at a small cost, six galleries, each 24 feet wide, of the entire length of the building, by which the floor-surface will be increased above one-third; that the whole outside surface of the roof will be covered with unbleached canvass, which will render breakage from hail impossible; that there will be a very large extent of surface fitted with luffer-boards, capable of being opened and shut, as occasion may require, to ensure a proper supply of pure air, the amount of which may be modified by passing through canvass, kept wet in very hot weather; that by employing iron, wood, and glass only in the superstructure, the building will, from the moment of its erection, be ready for decoration and occupation; that the weight of materials in this structure will not exceed one-fourth of those necessary for a brick building; and that "the construction of this building has been so arranged, as to admit of all its parts being prepared and delivered ready for fixing in place, and being put together and taken down far more easily than an ordinary brick building, which will greatly reduce all the constructive operations on the ground, lessen the number of labourers employed, and any amount of possible inconvenience to the neighbourhood."

The alterations in the design are mainly these: a keel-shaped fourth story, and a transept running north and south, so as to break up the long line of front, have been added. The total height will now be 100 feet, sufficient to inclose the highest of the trees on the ground, and Messrs. Fox and Henderson have taken the contract for its execution, to be completed in the present year, for the sum of 85,500*l.*,—the materials, if we understand rightly, remaining their property.

As to the general construction, we have no

means of judging, and we will not now look for objections to the design, so far as the intention is made known to us. Some, however, are tolerably obvious. We revert to those architects and others who originally sent in designs, simply to say, that they are still waiting for the Committee to redeem the pledge contained in the rules and conditions issued by them, wherein it is stated, that "as the credit of any such plan will be due solely to the contributors, the Committee propose to make a report, in which they will acknowledge by name those whose plans had been wholly or partially adopted, or who had afforded the most useful suggestions; and the Committee hope to be able to offer such other honorary distinction to the successful contributors as the circumstances may appear to warrant."

As to the wide-spreading book of lithographed plans, sections, and details, published by the committee, at the small charge of 5*l.* 5*s.*, this may now be put away amongst the curiosities of architectural experience. We are unable, however, even yet to congratulate the Committee on having got out of the mess.

In the recent selection of designs for the medals to be struck for the reward of Exhibitors, the same undue desire to distinguish foreign artists that was shown by the Building Committee, seems to have been exhibited. We are sick, however, of finding fault.

It has been the fashion to regard this exhibition of medals as an unfavourable response to the invitation of the Royal Commission; but we cannot think so. The public has been disappointed by its own unreasonable expectations: it vaguely looked for multiplicity and variety, where a due consideration would have taught it to expect little—to have sought the concrete and epigrammatic: the object of the competition was necessarily surrounded with limitations—limited by the laws of medal art—limited in size—and limited to a small circle of ideas: under these circumstances we cannot but think that the call was well responded to. The frequent recurrence of one idea must strike every observer; but this was to be expected.

Those who put aside the first thought and expressed a fresh idea, at all events, deserve notice. Such, for example, as No. 50 'the Trial of the Lever'; No. 113 'Science and Handicraft'; and No. 75, a clever attempt to express the characteristics of Britain in a single figure, standing on a rock inscribed with Peace, calling the nations of the earth to the exhibition of 1851; her garments fluttering in the gales of her stormy isle,—her beacon burning as a guide to nations,—her attributes of force, the lion, &c., discarded.

We will briefly describe what seems to us the intention of the six selected designs. No. 1, by Mons. Bonnardel, shows Mercury holding a female figure by the hand (intended to represent Industry apparently, from the anvil, locomotive, &c., near her), in front of a thick-set figure of Britannia standing on a slightly raised platform, with both hands extended holding wreaths: days of different nations make up the back ground.

In No. 2, by Mr. Leonard Wyon, Britannia seated is crowning Industry, a female figure, whose dress is powdered with bees: figures of the four quarters of the globe stand behind her. No. 3, by Mr. G. G. Adams, is a gracefully modelled group in low relief of Fame, Industry, and Commerce. No. 4, by Mr. Hancock (who gained the premium offered last year by the Art-Union of London), con-